
Army Agrees to New Study of Biowarfare Laboratory

The U.S. Army has agreed temporarily to hold up construction of a controversial new laboratory intended for tests of highly infectious and lethal biological aerosols, pending a study of potential environmental hazards from the facility. The agreement came as the result of a lawsuit initiated by Jeremy Rifkin, a Washington activist and author on biotechnology issues, and joined by the attorney general for the state of Utah, where the laboratory is to be constructed.

In the lawsuit, Rifkin sought a commitment by the Army to prepare either an environmental assessment or a formal impact statement on the new laboratory, which was authorized by a handful of congressmen under an unusual procedure last December (*Science*, 21 December, p. 1405). The laboratory is to be built according to P4 or maximum federal safety standards, and it has aroused some controversy because the data gathered there could potentially be used to develop offensive biological weapons, which are prohibited by a 1972 international treaty.

Rifkin had obtained affidavits from four scientists who asserted that such a laboratory is unnecessary, because permissible defensive research can be conducted with surrogate organisms that require less elaborate safety precautions. Richard Novick, director of the Public Health Research Institute in New York, was among those who maintained that "the aerosol characteristics of pathogens can be simulated with complete assurance by non-pathogenic organisms of the same general types." This view was also taken by David Dubnau, a molecular biologist at New York University.

In addition, Liebe Cavalieri, a biochemist at Cornell and a member of the Sloan-Kettering Institute for Cancer Research who is outspoken on recombinant DNA issues, and David Ozonoff, a physician who directs the environmental health section at Boston University's School of Public Health, noted that federal design standards for such high-security laboratories explicitly discourage the creation of aerosols.

In a filing with the U.S. district court

on 23 January, however, the Army conceded none of these points and acknowledged only that it had erred by deciding not to conduct an assessment of potential environmental problems. Unlike formal impact statements, such assessments are not required to consider alternatives or to take public comments into consideration. Depending on the conclusions reached by the Army and the U.S. court, however, the assessment could eventually lead to the preparation of a formal impact statement. It will be completed in a week or so.

—R. JEFFREY SMITH

U.S.-Soviet Academies to Resume Exchanges

Officials of the U.S. and Soviet academies of science have tentatively agreed to renew a formal exchange pact that lapsed in 1980. The pact, which provides for a series of cooperative workshops and scientific symposia during the next 2 years, results from a visit to Moscow on 21 and 22 January by a delegation headed by Frank Press, president of the National Academy of Sciences (NAS).

A list of the dozen or so topics to be discussed at the meetings is still being negotiated. But both sides have agreed that "only forefront fields of science" will be considered, and that participants will be selected jointly "to ensure substantive interaction." This provision was drafted by the NAS in order to prevent last-minute substitutions of lesser Soviet scientists, a frequent occurrence under the last agreement. The NAS is particularly interested in exchanges in mathematics and biotechnology.

At the urging of its members, the NAS had planned to restart the exchange program on two previous occasions, but demurred because of the Soviet shoot-down of a Korean airliner and because of a hunger strike by Andrei Sakharov, the eminent Soviet physicist. One reason for the NAS decision to go ahead now is the improved overall climate of relations in the aftermath of a decision to restart U.S.-Soviet arms negotiations. Another reason is that NAS officials have heard that Sakharov and his wife are healthy, and that he has been allowed

to pursue some scientific research in Gorky, the site of his internal exile.

In a brief printed statement, Press did not indicate whether Sakharov's plight came up during the trip to Moscow. He said only that the discussions "covered what constitutes a propitious climate for cooperation . . . [including] our concern about human rights."

The visit was apparently preceded by an amusing exchange between the NAS and the Commerce Department. NAS officials are reluctant to provide full details, but apparently Press had wanted to give a lap-held Radio Shack computer to A. P. Alexandrov, his Soviet counterpart. Just before leaving, he was informed by the Commerce Department that it was on a list of items that cannot be exported without a license. He settled on a computerized chess set instead. For Press, who is no stranger to the debate over export controls, it was a firsthand encounter with the controversial regulations enacted to prevent the leakage of advanced technology.

—R. JEFFREY SMITH

New Peace Committee at NRC

Social scientists at the National Research Council (NRC) are planning to set up a new NRC committee to explore ways the social and behavioral sciences can be applied to reducing the risk of war. The proposal is the result of a 1-day meeting last summer conducted by Nobel prizewinning economist Herbert Simon of Carnegie-Mellon University.

According to David Goslin, director of the NRC's Commission on Behavioral and Social Sciences and Education, the committee intends to gather research from the relevant disciplines on such matters as conflict resolution, negotiation, trust and confidence-building measures, the role of public opinion, and the implicit behavioral and social assumptions that underlie strategic thinking.

The group also hopes to make contact with social scientists in the Soviet Union for the purpose of exploring research possibilities. It is currently conducting financial discussions with David A. Hamburg of the Carnegie Corporation of New York and Ruth